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I Am Your Portion

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women in leadership is a complex, demanding ongoing study. The larger issue, though, is not political or even sociological. Instead, it is pragmatic, based on Paul's third principle. It is about what we need to do to facilitate God's work with the greatest likelihood of success—in each place where the gospel is carried out. In some cultures, the concept of men and women working side by side is not only acceptable but *expected*, and even required (sometimes by law). A desire for *uniform* practices in all parts of the world should never be allowed to impede the work in one place in order to avoid challenges in another. Instead, a line of logic that supports the application of differing congregational practices based on differing cultural realities has to be stated clearly and boldly—and then defended vigorously. In other words, we have to assert Paul's three principles with vigor and tenacity.

Finally, as we discuss the role of women in leadership, we must see that Paul's call to open wide the

doors of ministry is shaped by the driving value of love. Jesus told His disciples that the world will inevitably evaluate us on the basis of whether or not what we do is driven by love (John 13:35). Any other value gets in the way. We all need to be celebrating the contributions of Adventist women in leadership and working to expand opportunities for women everywhere. 

- 1 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 469.
- 2 I would recommend, as a convenient place to access this, the appendix on what Ellen White had to say on the topic, found in Patricia Habada and Rebecca Frost Brillhart, eds., *The Welcome Table* (Langley Park, MD: TEAM Press, 1995), beginning on page 301.
- 3 Ellen G. White, "The Duty of the Minister and the People," *Review and Herald*, July 9, 1895.
- 4 For example, Nancy Vyhmeister, ed., *Women in Ministry: Biblical & Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998) is a comprehensive scholarly book put out by the Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary and written by an impressive list of theologians and historians.
- 5 Lorna Tobler, "A More Faithful Witness" (paper, West Coast Religion Teacher's Conference, n.p., May 2–4, 1985), 2–6, quoted in Kitt Watts, "The Rise and Fall of Adventist Women in Leadership," *Ministry*, April 1995, 6.
- 6 Ellen G. White, "Looking for That Blessed Hope," *Signs of the Times*, June 24, 1889. (Ellen G. White preached this sermon in Washington, DC, on January 26, 1889.)
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 The recent 2011 Annual Council decision by the General Conference not to approve the request from the North American Division to accommodate the cultural realities in North America by allowing women and others on nonordained tracks (such as treasurers) to serve as conference presidents, serves to illustrate this divergence of opinion: 41.9 percent of the Annual Council delegates supported the NAD request; 58.1 percent did not approve the request. Thus, at the present time, a woman can serve as a conference secretary (the next highest office), but cannot—by policy—advance into the presidency.
- 9 This quote from Jan Paulsen was from written material in a Q & A section on the *Let's Talk* Web site, a forum for Adventist youth. However the original source no longer exists as this Web site was retired in 2010.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Per correspondence with Jan Paulsen, August 22, 2012.
- 12 Watts, "The Rise and Fall of Adventist Women," 6–10. "In 1905, for example, women held 20 out of 60 conference treasurer positions. The number of women heading conference departments was even more remarkable. In 1915 approximately two thirds of the 60 educational department leaders and more than 50 of the 60 Sabbath school department leaders were women." Ibid., 8.
- 13 Denis Fortin, "What Did Early Adventist Pioneers Think About Women in Ministry?" *Memory, Meaning & Faith* (blog), April 8, 2012, accessed August 20, 2012, www.memorymeaningfaith.org/blog/2010/04/adventist-pioneers-women-ministry.html#more.
- 14 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Business Proceedings: Fifth Meeting, Dec. 5, 10 A.M.," *Review and Herald*, December 20, 1881, 392. See also Helen Ward Thompson, "Questions and Answers About Women's Ordination and the Seventh-day Adventist Church," quoted in Habada and Brillhart, eds., *The Welcome Table*. Also discussed in Bert Haloviak, "Ellen White and the Ordination of Women" (sermon, Sligo, Maryland, Seventh-day Adventist Church, October 15, 1988), www.camelbackchurch.net/assets/391782.
- 15 Stephen Haskell, George Butler, and Uriah Smith.

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"I Am Your Portion"

In an increasingly more complex world, ministers carry immense burdens. They are to be great preachers, engaging teachers, empathetic counselors, visionary administrators, wise board chairs, and so on—the proverbial spiritual Superman or Superwoman.

As our time is limited to the same 24 hours the nonministerial population enjoys, we often struggle to keep first things first. The urgent displaces the important. The necessary outpaces the central. The pressing usurps the essential.

Revival and reformation is not only another good initiative, but God's way of reminding us daily in

whose business we are and describes our role in the greater scheme of things.

Numbers 18 outlines an important chapter regarding the role of priests and Levites in the Old Testament. Sure, we all understand that twenty-first century ministers are not priests or Levites. But somehow, when we consider the big picture, verse 20 should be the verse that guides and informs everything we do in ministry, including revival and reformation. As God speaks to Aaron and his sons, listen carefully, "I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel" (ESV). Priests did not own land in Israel as God was

their inheritance. Every morning, as they faced another busy day in the temple or teaching God's people, they were reminded of that foundational truth: "I am His—and don't want to be distracted!" It is a statement of ownership that rings down through the ages—right into our hearts.

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